



# The Tri-Cities Edifier

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## TRADITIONS AND DOCTRINE

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A RECENT VISIT with a young gospel preacher brought about a discussion regarding his concerns for the direction he's witnessing among some preachers of his generation—those about the age of my grandchildren. He specifically mentioned the inclination to change any practice among brethren that falls in the category of “our traditions.”

Brethren young and old understand that human traditions are not to be considered on a par with doctrine, and are subject to change. Hopefully, we also understand that such traditions are not inherently wrong, nor are they necessarily beneficial.

I realize that the desire for change is especially appealing to the young. After all, like the psalmist, “I have been young, and now am old” (Psa. 37:25), and I remember that youthful urge. Hopefully the young will live long enough to realize that with age comes comfort in familiarity.

It is usually young people who will advocate “change for the sake of change,” while the older generation often embraces the “don't fix what isn't broken” approach. Both have some merit. It may be that some long-standing traditions if left in place indefinitely, could become viewed as “binding.” On the other hand, if a traditional practice has proven itself to be edifying, to insist on change may actually prove to be unprofitable

Of course, if a tradition is found to be unscriptural, or detrimental to the work of the Lord, both young and old must be prepared to embrace change. When change is neither right nor wrong scripturally, it ought to be handled with care and concern for one another. The apostle Peter said it well: “Likewise you younger people be submissive to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility...” (1 Pet. 5:5).

Our discussion led to other matters of concern. I wondered if some of our unique doctrinal stances—those unlike the larger religious community—are being neglected. For instance, when was the last time you heard a sermon about why our worship in song is not accompanied by mechanical instruments? I wonder if we are raising a generation that views acapella singing as merely one of “our cherished traditions.” If so, a future generation will likely want to scrap that “tradition” and will resist any scriptural teaching on the subject.

Another doctrinal issue that seems to be getting less attention in our pulpits is the part baptism plays in salvation. I am not saying that every sermon should focus on the necessity of baptism, but it should be emphasized frequently. False teachers are out there convincing people they can be saved by just believing in Jesus and saying a “sinner's prayer.” We must not fail to refute this lie! If we don't, who will?

There also appears to be a trend among some brethren to blur the distinction between churches with people who have been “baptized into Christ” (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27) and other churches filled with zealously upright people who have

embraced the doctrines of “faith only,” “once-saved, always-saved,” and other errors of Calvinism. Admiration for their religious leaders and theologians who believe and actively promote doctrinal error leave an impression of endorsement and implies they are worthy of our fellowship.

Some among us who become infatuated with the evangelical movement eventually leave us and join such churches. Too often when this happens some brethren are unwilling to “note” and “avoid” them as “those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine” (Rom. 16:17). If along with us in Christ’s kingdom there are also “faith-only Christians,” that makes us just one denomination among many. If “we’re ok, they’re ok” there’s no need to even try to refute their doctrinal inaccuracies.

It has become quite popular in recent years for churches formerly affiliated with mainline denominations to break away from those organizations and claim to be “non-denominational.” This is a step in the right direction, but they have not actually abandoned the denominational concept. In fact, some of them have since formed affiliations not unlike the organizations they left. Others remain independent but maintain fellowship with other evangelical groups.

Most of our readers worship with other Christians in congregations that have long claimed to be non-denominational. Given the popularity and misuse of this term, our claim to be “non-denominational” may not be as accurate as we intend. Perhaps one tradition worthy of change would be to scrap the “non-denominational” designation in favor of “*undenominational*.”

Preaching truth and opposing error does not have to be harsh or unkind in order for it to be effective. Given the fact that it is becoming increasingly rare for people in religious error to even visit our assemblies, some might suggest that such preaching in our assemblies is like “preaching to the choir” (even though choirs are not part of our “tradition”). Agreed, there is a time to move beyond “the elementary principles” (Heb. 6:1-2) to other matters. However, this didn’t deter the apostle Peter from reminding Christians of truth that they already knew—truth in which the disciples were established (2 Pet. 1:12).

Just as our “often” observance of the Lord’s supper reminds us of the death of Christ while at the same time serving as a proclamation to unbelievers (1 Cor. 11:26), frequent reminders of how we were “baptized into Christ” (Rom. 6:4; Gal. 3:27) serve to teach unbelievers how to be saved.

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